DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 109 043 SO 008 486

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TITLE A New Breed of Social Studies Teachers? Or New School Systems?
PUB DATE 27 Nov 74
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council for the Social Studies (Chicago, Illinois, November, 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Change Strategies; *Educational Change; Educational Development; Educational Improvement; Educational Innovation; Education Courses; *Field Experience Programs; Relevance (Education); Schools of Education; *Social Studies; *Teacher Education; *Teacher Education Curriculum; Teacher Educators; Teacher Improvement; Teaching Experience

ABSTRACT

University education departments and teacher educators are not presently providing the innovative reform-minded milieu necessary to develop vital, deeply committed social studies teachers. Education degree programs are remarkably similiar in course requirements and format, emphasizing traditional lecture oriented courses and student teaching. Obstacles prohibiting the reform of education curricula include the ivory tower attitude of teacher educators, the growing distrust of practicing teachers toward teacher educators not involved in the day-to-day operations of the school, the intransigeance of the university to reform itself, and the resistance of youth to new approaches in education designed to change their present outlooks. Possible reforms to the current system include more direct involvement of education students in the public school system prior to their graduation. This innovation in turn requires greater involvement of teacher educators in the public school system. The teacher educator, committed to developing more innovative teachers, must spend more time in the field developing programs and school milieus conducive to creative teacher training and preparation. (Author/DE)

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A NEW BREED OF SOCIAL STUDIES TEACHERS?

OR NEW SCHOOL SYSTEMS?

by

Richard Wisniewski

SO 008 486

A New Breed of Social Studies Teachers? Or New School Systems?

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This paper analyzes an issue both debated and avoided by many social studies educators. The issue is plain: Should new teachers be prepared for existing roles, expectations and traditions in school systems? Or should they possess skills and attitudes that can only flourish in new kinds of schools? Our title suggests that a choice is possible, and the rhetoric of educational reform argues that a choice must be made. There is no doubt that failure to make choices perpetuates existent practices. But as is the case with most complex problems, both questions require affirmative answers. To argue one side or the other merely contributes to dualistic and unproductive thinking, as in the chicken-egg debate. Accepting both choices, on the other hand, is far more tradition-shaking than might be anticipated. Schools of the future will not emerge without different kinds of teachers to staff those schools, and the implications of this fact for teacher educators is great.

At the outset, let me make clear that university professors and social studies teachers do not have the same roles in our society. Significant differences exist and are appropriate. But there are also similarities and a commonness of purpose that is too often ignored. We depend on one another and we both contribute to the goals of public education. But our respective contributions are severely limited; we have yet to learn how to be mutually supportive. And we will be truly supportive of one another when we work in concert certain days of the week. The meaning of this innocent statement will be clarified as this discussion proceeds.

We would agree, then that public school teaching and university professing are similar but different professions, though both are part of the public school establishment. An excellent analysis of our similarities and differences will be found in Albert Yee's, "Classroom Teachers and Educational Scholars: What Do They Have In Common?"* Yee reviews some of the historical antecedents for the schism between education professors and classroom teachers. I agree with Yee's conclusion that it is the responsibility of professors to provide leadership in healing the schism. This paper attempts to extend Yee's work by espousing a point of view that goes beyond historical analysis. In essence, I seek to establish the bottom line of the argument. I am concerned with specifying what taking leadership means in our present situation.

Certainly, few of us would question the need for a new breed of teacher. Our literature is replete with calls for teachers who can implement the new social studies, a participatory, interdisciplinary model long the dream of many of us. Implicit in the very phrase "new breed" is the suggestion that

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*Albert H. Yee, "Classroom Teachers and Educational Scholars: What Do They Have in Common?", in Dwight Allen and Jeffrey Hecht, Editors, Controversies in Education (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Company, 1974).

we need more vital and action-oriented social studies teachers. Action-oriented in the sense that they engage their students in first-hand data collection, studying communities and developing historical, geographic, economic, sociological, antrhopological and political concepts by a first-hand immersion in social realities. The "new breed" represents the very best kind of social studies teachers that now populate the schools to some degree. These are persons with a deep commitment to making curricula alive and relevant for students, achieving that goal by working with students rather than merely transmitting information. The "new breed" is not merely a transmitter of culture. Rather, he/she is a student first and a teacher second, a conscious participant in the culture who by example encourages the study of society. The 'new breed' is the antithesis of the social studies teacher who hides behind Magruder's textbook, whatever it's title or variation, and who insists that the basic role of the teacher is to drone content into persons.

There is also little debate that fundamental changes are needed in school systems, particularly at the secondary level. The past decade revealed many archaic and incongruous aspects of schooling. Civil rights activists and the severe critics of education during the 1960's provided a real service in that they forced the educational establishment to respond. In responding, that establishment discovered a great deal about itself and about school practices. There are many more concerned teachers and administrators in the schools seeking to encourage basic reforms than was the case a decade ago. This is not to suggest that the reform process is moving swiftly. Nonetheless, anyone who has observed the school scene over the past 20 years must conclude that this decade is fundamentally far more open to reform and self-appraisal than were the '50's.

Many educators recognize that secondary schools remain essentially processing and sorting stations in the socialization process. They serve as a societal "holding tank", largely divorced from the society about them. Any change in this function of secondary education requires concomitant changes in other segments of society, in post-secondary education, in unions, and in business - to cite but three institutions with vested interests in maintaining present modes of secondary education. Career education is the concept currently being advocated as the fundamental organizational-curricular change that will redefine the function of secondary education. Career education may be an answer but the concept has as many meanings, advocates, and critics as did progressive education three decades ago.

Those changes that have taken place in the schools over the past decade have not come about because of any influx of a 'new breed' of social studies, however. Whether we discuss the growth of teacher power, of student power, or of post-Sputnik curricular reforms, the guiding hand of teacher educators is not to be seen. On the contrary, virtually all the major educational changes that have or are coming about are the result of political-social factors far broader in scope than anything within the realm of social studies educators. We are not a part of the process in any significant sense.

To put it most bluntly, if social studies educators are interested in helping produce a "new breed" of teacher or influence the direction of public school reform, a new stance on our part is required. That stance calls for a direct involvement in the preparation of teachers and in the reform of school systems as active participants, rather than as distant observers,

supervisors, evaluators, researchers or model builders. All of the latter activities are vitally needed, but they have been activities behind which we have hidden - creating a gulf between ourselves and the schools.

It is my contention that new teachers can be best prepared in a social milieu that encourages innovation, reform and the constant appraisal of practices and curriculum. That milieu should be characteristic of every school of education and university. But is it? Let us examine some of our teacher preparation practices and contrast them with what can be a far more positive and hopeful approach. We will concentrate on the preparation of secondary teachers since much of elementary social studies has been merged with the language arts, and social studies specialists at the elementary school level are not as common as once was the case. Focusing on the preparation of secondary teachers has another advantage. It is a professional truism that the reform of secondary education continues to be a far more serious conundrum than changes at the elementary school level; hence, it is a tougher context in which to grapple.

CURRENT PRACTICES

The preparation of secondary school social studies teachers, indeed of most secondary teachers, can best be described as a once-over-lightly. Let us acknowledge the various special projects and intern programs that intensify the process for handfuls of new teachers. They are superior to the model found in most schools of education and more power to them. By and large, the basic pattern of preparation is well known and replicated over and over. The typical secondary major does as little as possible in anything that might be called a professional sequence, with emphasis placed on the completion of one or more majors in the social sciences and other university requirements. His/her professional training probably includes some form of introductory education course, an educational psychology course, a methods course, and some limited and archaic form of student teaching. If the program is typical, there will be no articulation between the introductory course, the educational psychology course, the methods course, or the student teaching. If the student is lucky, he/she may have the services of an advisor during the process. More likely, however, the student will be supervised by someone working on an advanced degree who has been assigned the low status work of supervision. Practices at the elementary level are not <u>that</u> different, but there are more instances of teacher education reform among elementary programs than is the case at the secondary level.

Given this very superficial preparation for teaching, and given the very best intentions and rhetoric of instructors who work with students in their discrete classes, it is unlikely that any 'new breed' of teacher is likely to emerge. Why should we assume anything otherwise? The training period is so limited in scope and intensity that it is gratifying we do as well as we do. The expectations of the school system on the new school teacher clearly outweigh any influence that the university might have.

If we apply Robert Merton's typology of individual adaptation to social systems (conformity, innovation, retreatism, ritualism, and rebellion),* there

*Robert K. Merton, <u>Social Theory and Social Structure</u> (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1957), Chapter IV.

is no doubt that the overwhelming bulk of teachers conform to the expectations of the school system. They accept both the goals of the school and the means instituted to achieve those goals. Most persons conform, and only a limited number become innovators - a role both needed and rewarded by school systems. The innovators also accept the goals of public education, but seek more effective means to implement them. That the new teacher might have been exposed to aspects of the new social studies, or that they may have been exhorted to "be different", "to be innovative", "to be challenging" are facts unlikely to have much impact. Even if the person is idealistic and determined to be different, the odds are still very much on the side of the social system he/she is entering. The new teacher will in the main adapt to the mores, behaviors and expectations of schools as they are today. This is a difficult fact for most of us to accept, especially those of us in the intellectual community. Our value system stresses the importance of individuality and of being "above the mob." We find it difficult to acknowledge how powerful the expectations of social systems are and the degree to which we are molded by them.

If we are honest with ourselves, we will admit that the expectations put upon us as professors of teacher education are also not conducive, by and large, to encourage involvement in the reform of education at any level - including the university level. Intensive work with our colleagues in the public schools is especially dangerous. The university reward system encourages us to remain as separated as possible from the field. As long as we research changes or write about them we will be rewarded. But if we seek to actually implement that which we are researching or evaluating, we tend to divorce ourselves from our colleagues - and like all divorces, a price must be paid: denial of tenure, merit increases or promotion.

If we acknowledge the forces that work upon us, we may be more willing to acknowledge even more powerful forces working on the new teacher. Teaching is a very difficult job. It is enervating and exhausting, particularly in the first year or two when so much has to be learned about the growth of development of adolescents, the separate culture of schools (to use Willard Waller's term), the limits on productivity imposed on us by our colleagues, the bureaucratic nature of the schools, and so on. Even the best of our new teachers are swamped by all of the things that they need to learn and do. As we have been so often told by our graduates, there was little in their preparation that truly prepared them for the onslaught of secondary teaching. And I cannot do more than mention in passing the "turning-off" phenomenon experienced by many new teachers when they recognize how many of their students are also turned-off by education.

But none of this is new to any perceptive social studies educator. Neither will be the solution that I propose, for indeed I believe that solutions are possible. We have a number of things going for us that was not the case a decade or so ago. There <u>are</u> school administrators and officials desirous of reforming the social studies curriculum at the secondary level. They recognize that it has been a stagnant area for a long time. Again, this is not meant to disparage the contributions of excellent teachers in secondary education, or of some of the new curricula. But it does acknowledge that secondary social studies remains to a large degree a hazy reflection of university social sciences: highly departmentalized and compartmentalized, essentially utilizing textbook and recitation methodologies, emphasizing the transmission of knowledge as an end in itself.

The cries for reform during the '60's frequently focused on the social studies, and many school people have listened. We have a greater number of teachers who represent the 'new breed' than was the case a decade or so ago. The '60's was an era in which many teachers had to examine their goals and performance. A number of them emerged far more willing to speak out against current practices and expectations. These persons no doubt are reflected in the greater militancy of teachers, a phenomenon almost unthinkable in the years of Eisenhower complacency. Whatever the reasons, I am sure we can agree that there are far more teachers in the schools open to reform than was the case ten years ago.

We also have the help of the new curricula and of the publishers. There have been many approaches to action-oriented social studies curricula. There is no difficulty whatever in selecting one of these approaches and building a new preparation process around it.

SOME OBSTACLES

But we still have other factors that will make any new approach difficult. First and foremost, is the distrust of university personnel by teachers. In our attempts to become academically respectable, many of us effectively discredited ourselves. We sought to behave like professors in other disciplines and we cut to a bare minimum our contact with our public school colleagues. Other than an occasional supervision stint (with that being shuttled to low status colleagues in the main), most social studies educators do not have a viable relationship with the schools. The Ivory Tower charge leveled at us is far more accurate than we care to admit. Most of us will need to vigorously alter our behavior if the gulf between our programs and the field is to be bridged.

A second factor making any new approach a negotiable idea is the fact that teachers are becoming far more organized and determined to participate in all aspects of the profession. They do not view themselves as persons to be told what to do by university types. Anyone who has been deeply involved in teacher education over the past decade knows this fact. But since so many teacher educators are not deeply involved in the process, this fact may need to be learned by some of us. Interestingly, some will argue that nothing can be done because of the level of distrust, rather than initiating a host of ways to negotiate better relations.

A third factor that will make it difficult is the intransigency of the university itself in respect to reform. We are so wedded to credit hours, to semesters and quarters, to archaic load formulas, that it is sheer hypocrisy for teacher educators to castigate the public schools for failing to respond to new goals of instruction. The truth of the matter is that public schools, even at the secondary level, are far ahead of us vis a vis new approaches to the teaching-learning process.

A fourth problem is that the gulf between adolescent society and adult society continues to grow. The youth culture in America, greatly accentuated by commercial interests for their own profit, is a fact of life nonetheless. A certain percentage of youth resist any and all new approaches to education as mechanisms to coopt them. To some degree, we need to admit that

we are indeed seeking to coopt our students. But this is probably the least serious of the obstacles facing us. Because so much of secondary education is boring, most teachers who have attempted new approaches have eventually won the respect of the majority of their students. They gain acceptance because they are offering something with a reality base, something that makes the high school student feel that he/she is a part of society rather than a prisoner of that society.

The approach to overcome all of these obstacles is one in which process rather than content is paramount. If that sounds familiar, so be it. It is interesting to note that virtually every critique of educational practice in our literature emphasizes that education is a process and that content should never be a means to its own end. Despite the hoary nature of the idea, it always seems to sound fresh when calls to reform are made.

Let me be explicit, however, as to the role of content in the preparation of the so-called "new breed." I would argue that no person be permitted into student teaching until that person has mastered whatever the subject area content germane to his/her preparation. I have no quarrel with persons earning a solid major or perhaps two majors in the social sciences. Indeed, my only quarrel is with those responsible for those majors. I would hope that they are utilizing the best teaching-learning processes in developing mastery. I would hope further that preparation would be as interdisciplinary as possible. It seems to me that the true social studies teacher does not see himself/herself as a history teacher or as an economics teacher. The true social studies teacher personifies Pope's view that the proper study of man is man himself, not the fractionated man that our disciplines continue to pretend exists. This view is, of course, familiar to us; it is the basis on which the National Council was established. We still have a long way to go to achieve this goal, haven't we? Fortunately, this point of view is gaining strength in each discipline and we may yet see some basic reform in university disciplines. I have little evidence for this hope other than the hope itself. But I have no doubt as to what it minimally needed in the reform of the teacher education process.

NEEDED UNIVERSITY REFORMS

A minimal reform needed is in the articulation of all the courses required in the profession sequences. The reasons for this are so obvious and yet so frequently ignored by the profession. Our systems of departmentalization and load definition preclude anything other than spasmodic attempts at articulation. We need to make sure that the professional sequence does not have overlapping content, that it is to some degree competency based, and that the progression of experiences are such that we will have full confidence in our graduates - and they in us.

Most importantly, all aspects of that sequence must be field-based. There is no way to prepare teachers, other than inadequately, if we continue to utilize college lectures-discussions as the primary mechanism by which educational skills and attitudes are to be developed. Every methods course must be taught in a public school setting. It must be taught at a time when children are present, for obvious reasons. There is no question that laboratory methods such as micro-teaching must also be utilized extensively.

Most importantly, the prospective teacher must have far more experience with children of all ages prior to student teaching. Clinical experiences must permeate all aspects of the professional sequence. Student teaching by and large is now a sink or swim experience. After a procession of courses in which grade point is utilized as a measure of skills, a person is sent out to test those skills and one hopes for the best. In most cases everything works out well because the level of expectation among all parts of the establishment are minimal.

We must get to the point where student teaching is merely a more intensive experience in a sequence of field experiences. Student teachers should be placed with the best teachers in the best buildings in the field - or not at all. Given the oversupply of social studies teachers, the latter option is not as hard a decision as it may appear to be. Our students should be placed in the best schools only after they have demonstrated a commitment to teaching and youth, and have attained minimal levels of self-confidence and skill in every professional course they take. The move toward teaching centers is one illustration of how all of this can be achieved.

None of this is new, of course, and I shall return to that fact. More importantly, none of it can happen without some fundamental changes in how we as teacher educators spend our time. But none of it is impossible. That these approaches make sense has been demonstrated over and over in pilot programs over the past 15 years. The fact that we still need to plead for implementation on a broader scale simply underscores the limitations of pilot programs. They come and go, usually on the heels of federal or foundation money. Those of us who wish to be reformers, therefore, do not have to look very far to seek ideas. The pilot programs showed us the way, but our entrenched practices have survived.

We now come to the most important ingredient in so many of the pilot programs. And that is the direct involvement of teacher educators in school systems. If we accept that the influence of the school system is the primary factor in the socialization of the new teacher, then we have to be directly involved with the schools - or acknowledge our impotence once and for all.

A PROPOSAL

Here, then, is the point of this discussion. I would argue that all social studies educators have as a normal part of their work load some form of educational program in the public school for which they are to some degree responsible and to which they contribute some portion of their time. This may be an experimental classroom, it may be a special program for selected students, it may be an in-service activity, it may be a community-based educational experience, or it may be as broad as organizing an alternative school. Whatever its form, the social studies educator must be part of an on-going field program in which to involve his/her prospective students. Whether the teacher educator works in established programs or is breaking new ground, he/she must put to the test that which he/she preaches. This form of behavior calls for professional strengths and for a willingness to flounder on occasion, but it

is an activity that will reverse an intolerable situation - if it is not already irreversible! Gone would be the traditional supervisory role of social studies educators. Rather than being a supervisor, the social studies educator would be a participant with groups of his/her students in school settings. That participation more than any lecture, book, or new piece of research would demonstrate to prospective teachers the best of what we know about growth and learning and the social studies curriculum.

The bottom line of this argument requires a fundamental redefinition of how we spend our time. Without facing that fact, we retreat to a range of avoidance behaviors and arguments. I will not list their forms here for I am far more interested in the "new breed" of social studies educators - who must precede any "new breed" of social studies teachers. The social studies educator concerned with the preparation of a "new breed" will do so by working with new teachers in the field. He/she will help develop schools that can be used for the preparation of teachers. He/she would be involved in in-service activities that provide a milieu conducive to the preparation of teachers. He/she will not be a supervisor under these conditions and, indeed, no supervision would be necessary. If the student teacher is working hand in hand with the professor, the true dynamics of an apprenticeship are at work. Gone would be the superficial current practice of having student teachers fear the traditional three visits by the university professor - by a stranger to the schools.

As already noted, none of these suggestions are new, and therefore they are a bit depressing. How much longer will we continue to bemoan whether or not we need a "new breed" or changes in the secondary schools without recognizing that we must first change our own practices? That is the basic issue facing anyone concerned with teacher preparation. The suggestions made above are not unique answers. Rather, they simply sketch in broad strokes what needs to be done in the preparation of secondary school teachers if we have any hope at all of influencing what goes on in the public schools. Like most fundamental ideas, it is not complicated.

It is because of its very down-to-earthness that we as a profession have tended to withdraw from it. We continue to evade the central issue by rationalizing that new curricula, or new publications, or new research will bring about the needed reforms. They contribute to the process, but at an evolutionary and exceptionally erratic pace.

I have the greatest respect for research and the analysis of ideas; these are two of our prime responsibilities as professors. Any teacher educator not involved in the scholarly process is not making a serious contribution to the profession.* But the intensity and relevance of our research and model building

*I am painfully aware of the many assumptions made about teacher education practices in this paper for which only intuitive evidence exists, i.e., the "sample of one" best defined as long years of experience. This is partly the case because research in teacher education does not usually focus on the professoriate. Rather, we seek to determine if some new practice is learned and implemented by our students. Many reformers, on the other hand, directly address the basic obstacle to changes in teacher preparation: the unwillingness of teacher educators to become actively involved in field-based programs. Debating the issue in a footnote is hardly productive. It is my intent, however, to gather data on this phenomenon and hope to present that information at a future NCSS meeting.

will be greatly enhanced by our active involvement in the educative process on a broader scale than is now the case. Withdrawal into the university values of research, model building and writing is no answer, and that is exactly what most of us have done. We have reduced our commitments to the field to as small a percentage of time as possible.

What is needed is a great deal more sweat on our brows. It is the kind of sweat endangered by regular working relationships with public schools in projects and programs of which we are a part. We never would make the trip alone, however. We would always have clusters of our students with us. In that type of situation, learning about teaching would be as realistic and as relevant as we at the university have any hope of making it. If we are willing to get that sweat on our brow, we will redefine what we have become. We need to be scholars, of course, but our scholarship must be based on our direct involvement in the process we study The test of any professional school is the degree to which it has a viable working relationship with and an influence on its profession. We can no longer divorce ourselves from the schools and teachers in the field. We need to work with them, to taste victory and adversity with them, and it is in that process that we can best prepare future teachers. Even more importantly, the crises facing public education require that all of us who value education work on ways to improve it and to preserve it as a fundamental goal of our society.

We will still have time to reflect and to write. Indeed, if we ever lose that aspect of our professorial lives then we really have no business in higher education. Further, we will greatly enhance our opportunities for research and analysis. But if we retreat merely to talking and writing about what ought to be, we have lost contact with the field. Going to occasional state teachers conventions does not alter that fact. Knowing a handful of teachers that one can call for favors does not alter that fact. Knowing some principals by their first names does not alter the fact.

I am talking about a working relationship which means that certain days of the week are spent in the public schools. Nothing less will do, and quite frankly, has not done for us over the past several decades. If only one full day of a week were devoted to this activity, we would be reversing a trend that continues to debilitate our profession. That still leaves four days for what we do now - but my guess is we will alter that fraction when the accolades of our profession reach us. This idea may be old - and some view it as trite - but it is where we must begin. The cycle we are in must be broken. Our greatest influence as educators is not in what we say but in the values implicit and explicit in our behavior. When we are actively involved in field-based preparation programs with our students, we will not need to talk about what needs to be done in schools - or preparation programs. We will be doing it. We will be actively shaping the future, rather than merely awaiting its arrival.

New schools? New teachers? We must be a part of both answers.